

## INTRODUCTION

The intent of this book is to draw to the reader's attention the great human potential which resides inherently within each of us. This potential, despite being so universally common, is a source and a power to which very few gain full access. The subject of this book is the life and development of Alexander M. Poniatoff. Poniatoff is the founder and spirit behind Ampex Corporation--renowned for its technological pioneering in the field of both audio and video tape recording.

Part I of the book is a biographical sketch of the Russian-born Poniatoff. It is provided to reveal many of the events and incidents which were key to his development. It covers a development that took him from a boy in a small Russian village, to heading one of the world's largest electronics firms. It is also a development that caused several significant changes in attitude and thought. His active involvement with these changes do not occur until much later in his life, but, as is his nature, when Poniatoff does take them up, he does so with the same conscientious intent and interest which has marked his life.

Parts II and III provide the reader with some of his most essential findings. Part II is based upon Poniatoff's keen interest in the study of nutrition and stress relief. This interest was originally kindled by a book on natural healing given to him in 1922 in a Shanghai hospital, as he lay struggling to survive a case of yellow fever. It would be some 42 years later before he would take actual involvement when, in 1965 he formed The Foundation for The Study of Nutrition and Stress Research. Poniatoff writes this part of the book in collaboration with the Director of the Foundation, Hans Weber, and attempts to outline some of the more essential guidelines for living longer, more productive lives. Poniatoff contends that by eating the right food, taking the right amount of aerobic exercise and practicing some form of stress relief should put the average life span of a person at 110 years (as opposed to 70).

In Part III of the book, an attempt is made to describe the spiritual growth, and particularly late in his life, the spiritual experience, which has become such a key element in Poniatoff's life. It has been this spiritual awakening and the energy he has experienced with his Inner Self which Poniatoff wishes to relate. Again, as is his nature, he desires to share a positive experience which he feels could be the key to the reader's life as well.

For Poniatoff, this book is a contribution. It is his attempt to give back to the world much of what it has afforded to him. As the biographic sketch will show, often times it seemed as if providence itself was acting in his favor; as he managed to escape one "close call" after another. Other times, it was his uncanny intuition which seemed to provide him with the insight to make a decision which appeared in direct contrast with rational logic. Many incidents seem unexplicable, even mysterious.

But like all of our lives, Poniatoff's life is a process of experience and growth. What varies, of course, are the experiences, but even more, the way in which we perceive and thereby evolve from these experiences. At 86 years of age, Alexander Poniatoff is busier and more vital than at any prior time in his life. He believes that at this same age all of us can enjoy this kind

of productivity. Part of being productive is living properly to attain long lives. The other part is changing our consciousness concerning old age, and by doing so, <sup>be</sup> more able to realize <sup>the</sup> great possibilities and fulfilling satisfaction this portion of our lives can hold for us.

Poniatoff hopes, by recounting his own life and by offering us much of what he has discovered from it, he can help effect this change and awaken people's awareness as to their human potential.

Alexander Matthew Poniatoff was born March 25, 1892. As is Russian tradition, he received his first name from the patron saint the Russian orthodox church attributed to that particular day of the week on which he was born. And, as always, no matter male or female, he took his fathers name, Matthew, as his middle name. Poniatoff was born in a small village called Aisha which lies about 400 miles east of Moscow. Aisha is part of the Kazan District. In this district, the city of Kazan is the largest city. In contrast to the log huts of Aisha, Kazan in the 1890's, was a city of some distinction. Situated on the Volga River it was afforded natural access to commerce and trade - and the outside world. Kazan's greatest feature, in fact, was its' university which was done in Classical Greek architectural style. The university represented a level of cultural attainment for the city and was a source of interest and pride for the people of the Kazan District. Though Aisha is just 35 miles from Kazan, it required a horseman eight hours to make the journey; and, if he was pulling a cart or sleigh as much as twelve hours. Therefore, trips into Kazan were made very infrequently by the people of Aisha.



Aisha, as its' name indicates, was founded by the Tartars somewhere around the mid 13th century; when they had stormed up from the central Asian steppes to conquer much of Russia. Later in 1552, Ivan IV (The Terrible) of Russia reconquered the Tartars and declared towns such as Aisha, Russian. Many of these Tartars, however chose to stay in Russia - especially in the beautiful forest area around Kazan. They, no doubt, recognized the benefits of the ample rain fall, and rich productive soil of this area.

Though the Tartars and Russians shared about equally the 50 odd homes that made up the village of Aisha, the two people were divided by the Aisha River. Religion was the primary reason for their separation and their difference could be symbolized on either bank by the <sup>mosque</sup> ~~most~~ minarets of the Muslim Tartars and the church <sup>spires</sup> ~~spine~~ of the Russian orthodox.

Even though Aisha was an agricultural community and most poeple farmed, it was generally understood that a man of initiative and ambition sought supplementary means of earning his living. Some doubled as butchers or millers, while others took up a specific craft. Alexander Poniatoff's



grandfather, Ephrem Nickifor Poniatoff, had earned an ample living dying blue, the cloth of the locally grown and manufactured hemp. Alexander's father had managed to purchase a section of forest from a local 'esquire' and by a clever and resourceful means had cut, milled and sold the timber. Much of this wood was utilized in the making of carriages and sleighs. For his labor force Matthew Ephrem Poniatoff used almost exclusively Tartars as they proved to be the most reliable and the hardest workers. The profits from this business were such that Matthew Poniatoff soon became the wealthiest man in Aisha.

One form this wealth took was that of a two room log hut rather than just the customary one room. The Poniatoff house had the distinct privilege of having a kitchen room separate from the living and sleeping quarters. From this set-up Alexander's mother, Agafia ~~Andrew~~ Poniatoff managed the household with ease and charm. In addition to Alexander, the Poniatoffs' had two daughters and another son.

Agafi~~n~~a Poniatoff's nature was one of compassion and caring. Often times village women, either Russian or Tartar, suffering from some kind of misfortune would find relief from their sadness or misery by visiting Agafi~~n~~a Poniatoff. Alexander remembers many a pitiful, weeping session in which hi<sup>s</sup> mother would most often express equal, if not more grievance, than the unfortunate neighbor. Always, she would give these women a large jar of sauerkraut she specifically stored away for such occasions; and, as Alexander recalls these woman usually left smiling through their tears. This habit of storing extra sauerkraut became an annual project for Agafia as she realized that the health of many villagers deteriorated in late winter or early spring when their sauerkraut rations became low. She made the connection between eating sauerkraut and good health and so preserved extra amounts to dispense to needy families.

Whereas Alexander's mother was exemplary of human compassion, his father was much more of a practical business man. ~~Th~~is rule and authority in the house, as it was and is in traditional Russian families<sup>s</sup>, was unquestioned and absolute. His role was not only as provider but also one in which values and attitudes were taught in almost sermon-like fashion. One of his most

emphatic expressions and lessons as Alexander recalls, was "if anything happens to you, it's your own fault!" Which was to say, 'you alone are responsible for your life and it is up to you to stand on your own feet and be the master of life's situations.'

Despite the benefit Poniatoff feels he gained from such paternal lessons, a subtle conflict began developing within him. On one hand he witnessed the compassion of his mother and on the other the strong, clear-cut business principles of his father. To him these traits were contrasting and clashing. Which was he supposed to emulate?

As did all houses in rural Russia, the front room of the Poniatoff home included a shrine at which to pray. The Poniatoff's, in fact, had two shrines - one in back for more private family use and the other in front for more general use. When a visitor arrived, for example, before any food or tale-telling was indulged in, time was taken to kneel at the shrine and give a prayer of thanks for the safe arrival. Agafia Poniatoff was a descendant of the 'Old Believer' religious cult. The history of the OLD BELIEVERS actually dates back to Saint Vladimir, the social and religious Russian reformer of the 10th century.



Saint Vladimir decided the multi-God animism of his people was out-dated, so commissioned a committee to travel to Europe and study and select what they considered the most 'suitable' religion. The committee found the elaborate ornateness of the Greek orthodox particularly impressive and brought it back to Russia. The Bible was quickly translated by a Russian monk into Slavic and after a mass baptism in which Saint Vladimir ordered everyone into the rivers, this form of Christianity was established. The religion flourished for about five hundred years. In the fifteenth century however, Czar \_\_\_\_\_ ordered a re-translation of the Bible, after discovering many pronounced mistakes in the original Slavic version. Consequently, he ordered the populace to burn their old Bibles as he retranslated and reissued the new edition. Understandably, for many people the Bible was their most sacred possession whose very physical form symbolized their deep faith. For them, even under threat of prosecution, to burn their Bibles was unthinkable. Therefore, they took their religion underground to catacomb - like sanctuaries where they prayed and worshipped in their old style. These people were referred to as the "OLD BELIEVERS". Over time, many of these subterranean shrines became victims of the heavy

Russian snows, as when the snow melted, the water seeped down and rotted their wooden icons. The OLD BELIEVERS therefore became some of the first to make their icons of brass. Much later when Alexander was to go off to war his mother would sew one of these small brass icons into his coat pocket.

Another symbol for the male OLD BELIEVERS was a belief of never cutting their facial hair. Though Matthew Poniatoff was not an Old Believer descendant, he did wear a full beard. As far as his religious faith went however, he was religious in convention only. He maintained only the prescribed societal expectations of a religious man. Agafia Poniatoff, however, was a woman of sincere and deep faith. When she knealt and prayed at the shrine her faith filled the household. One way she had of bringing other sources of religious expression into the house, was by the quite substantial library she developed and which was unique in the village. She gathered these books from a \_\_\_\_\_ or book peddler who would spend his days walking from village to village with a large leather satchel of books for sale over his shoulder. Most of the books for sale and, which she bought, dealt with the lives and stories of religious saints and martyrs. Some others were more historical, recounting the life and nobility of some past czar. On the long winter nights of northern Russia the Poniatoff

family used to huddle together by the fire and listen intently while Fedor, Alexander's older brother, read aloud to them tales of great deeds and the personal sacrifices of a well known Saint or martyr. Often time these sessions would end with the entire family, except of course Father Poniatoff crying helplessly in the face of so much tragic virtue. Alexander even remembers his brother crying so despondently he was unable to read.

In this atmosphere, Alexander Poniatoff spent his early years. It was a simple, secure life where going barefoot was the norm in the summer and wearing snug and beautiful fur boots carried him throughout the cold, white winters. Because he was the son of the wealthiest man in the village, in addition to being bright and friendly, he received special treatment. A local carriage and sleigh maker went out of his way to make a special hand made miniature sleigh for the young boy. Needless to say, this possession earned him a great deal of status in the village. In such a small village as Aisha, with a population of approximately 250, he attained a special status. He was voted captain of the school LAPTA, or baseball team. His wants, his words, and his actions received extra attention - in short; he was at the top!



At an early age Alexander revealed a bright and easy competence in his school work. Therefore, when he reached eight years of age his father decided to send him away to Kazan to 'high school'. This move was by no means the usual for a young village boy; in fact, Alexander was the only boy from Aisha and most probably the several villages in his vicinity to be offered such an opportunity. This decision was facilitated by the fact that Alex's sister Agripina, fourteen years his senior, was living in Kazan with her husband and arrangements were made for the boy to board with them. Alex' brother-in-law had also been a country boy, but had succeeded in becoming a successful carriage and sleigh merchant in Kazan, after working his way up from the lowly position of digging up tree stumps in the forest. Both Alex' brother-in-law and even his father considered life in Kazan City a large and positive step up from the quiet country life style of a place like Aisha. Life in the city with its grand university, its streets lined with Kerosene lamps and elegant clothing stores and its opportunities in the way business and social connections was, <sup>in their mind,</sup> far superior. It was most country people's dream to live in the city. Though Matthew Poniatoff was respected in Aisha, he was not a man of distinction in the city; nor, he understood, would he ever be. For his son, Alexander, however, he recognized



<sup>the</sup>  
~~one~~ possibility of making this transition and so when the opportunity presented itself, he sent his son to the city.

Alexander's initial experiences in the Kazan high school proved to be far from positive, however. One of the first few days of school, he was picked upon by a few good natured but intimidating upper class bullies who found the boy so young and 'cute' they promptly picked him up and proceeded to parade him around the school proudly displaying their prize pet. The experience was a humiliating one for young Poniatoff and set him back socially for some time. In school, when he spoke, he soon realized his country dialect caused a great amount of amusement for the local Kazan city boys. Suddenly, where he had once felt a kind of haughty security in himself and his station, he now experienced the terrible gnawings of self-doubt. Where once speaking and acting had all the natural ease of confidence and spontane<sup>ity</sup>~~city~~, now in Kazan, he felt self conscious and unsure. He became inhibited and solemn.

Alexander spent nine years at the Kazan High School. Though he may have suffered socially, as human nature so often times does, he ~~comp~~ensated by exceling academically. More and more he began to realize the potential in the field of technology. His interest in this area had been stimulated originally

when at seven years of age on a trip to Kazan with his father, he had seen his first locomotive. He was so astounded and impressed with such a machine, that he excitedly asked his father who was responsible for such a machine. When he was given the answer, 'engineers', he decided at that moment that he too, would become an engineer and make such machines.

Alexander's technological prowess, though undoubtedly recognized by his teachers, was not always given full encouragement. Once when his geometry teacher asked him to recite the conditions for a hyperbola equation, he responded that he was unable to recite the answer from memory but he would be willing to work out the answer as he understood the concept. Skeptically the teacher ordered him to the backside of the blackboard, where after a few minutes, much to the teachers restrained amazement, the boy produced the correct equation.

In the first decade of the twentieth century technology and its' most recent discoveries we're enjoying world-wide acclaim. Albert Einstein's Theory of relativity had been recently published in 1905. Thomas Edison's discovery of electricity, though discovered much earlier, was being put into world-wide utilization. The city of Kazan even installed electric powered



street cars which now competed with horse carriages for the right of way.

Amidst all this discovery young Alexander sensed the unlimited possibilities in this field and he, himself, was eager to learn and discover.

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The enthusiasm and energy in this field of technology were so great that he and his classmates began to acclaim,

'that it was simply a matter of time before they would be able to prove the existence of God from a mathematical equation'. In any case Alexander finished his high school studies "with flying colors" and the next question became -

which <sup>college</sup> ~~school~~ of technology should he enter. After some deliberation between the top two, The Moscow Imperial College of Technology and The St. Petersburg College of Technology, he eventually chose to go to Moscow with the hopes of acquiring a mechanical engineering degree.

Some time before this however, when Alexander was about fourteen years old, the question of the existence of God did enter his mind. One Sunday afternoon when he was home in Aisha his family was hosting the village priest to lunch. Alexander recognized this instance as an opportunity to clarify some of his religious doubts. He asked the priest in effect...

"Is not God responsible for this earth and putting men upon this earth?"

When the priest indicated this was so, he continued.

"Is not God responsible for man's actions and consequently, his destiny?"

Again, the priest confirmed the boy's statement. 'Why then would a benevolent God cause a person to sin and thereby condemn that man to an after life such as exists in Hell...an after life that is not for a hundred or even a thousand years but forever, for eternity?'

The priest, obviously not expecting such a brash and outright confrontation of this nature reacted to the question indignantly. Alexander's parents, embarrassed for the priest and the situation, quickly excused their son.

Alexander's reaction in turn, was one of confusion and loss. How could he possibly have faith in a religion or a God that in one hand was said to be benevolent but on the other acted quite malevolently? Despite possessing the seeds of faith, his interest and pursuit of religious discovery were squelched by this incident. It would be years before this question was clarified for him.

Alexander's acceptance to the Imperial College of Moscow was far from secure when he arrived in that tremendous city. He learned that over 1,000

applicants would be competing for just 300 places. Students would be chosen by means of a general aptitude examination. Fortunately, he passed this examination and was admitted to the college. One of Alexander's traits which he recognized at an early age and which stood him well in such an exam, was the ability he had to recall any theory or concept once he had understood it clearly. The basic math, trigonometry and calculus concepts he had learned in high school would be the very ones which he would utilize in this exam and apply throughout his life.

After a year at the university, the students closed the school down with a strike. The protests were political. The students were expressing their disapproval of the unequitable distribution of land in Russia and the miserable working conditions of the factory workers. At the time young Poniatoff had few political persuasions and wished only to proceed and progress with his engineering.

He arrived home back in Aisha to an abrupt homecoming. Matthew Poniatoff had told his son that he would support him as long as he was attending school. When he discovered the reason for his son's unscheduled visit, he wasted little



time in utilizing the boy in his labor force. For the following few days, Alexander found himself suffering from the strains of hand ploughing a large field.

The experience was enough to hasten his considerations of his academic alternatives and soon he was asking his father for permission to study abroad.

Again his father assured full consent to support his son if he was, in fact, pursuring his studies. Therefore, young Poniatoff applied and was accepted for study in Germany.

Alexander Poniatoff arrived in Germany in the autumn of 1910. He was now 18 years of age. He discovered there were basically three top technical schools in Europe; one in Liege in Belgium, and the other two in Berlin and Karlsruhe, Germany. <sup>2</sup> He found out he was not qualified for the Berlin School because he had learned no classical Greek. He was so up in the air as to where to go that when his turn came up to buy a train ticket, he didn't know which city to state, as his destination. Finally, the man behind him *and by this means his decision was made* ordered him to 'Hurry Up' so he blurted out Karlsruhe; <sup>✓</sup> Karlsruhe happened to have two top men of technology Bauer and Bonte. Bonte, in particular, was an attraction to Poniatoff as he had been a leading pioneer in the German

development of the turbo engine locomotive; the desire to build and understand the mechanics of this intricate machine was still a strong one in young Poniatoff.

School life was quite a bit different in Germany than it had been in Russia. The first day he was walking along the street trying to find his way when he stopped two students on the street and in his halting German asked them directions. After a long pause by the two and a quizzical look, they asked Alexander if he was Russian. When he answered that he was, they both burst into hysterics announcing that they, too, were Russian. Immediately one of these boys, a boy named Feldman, took young Poniatoff under his wing, as he no doubt realized the peril a new student, especially one from another culture and system, could suffer at the hands of the unique German student corporation system. As was customary, this older Russian student became his tutor and protector or in German, his Bursch, and Alexander became his Fuch<sup>s</sup>, (fox).

One of the first items to attend to was to teach the new Russian student how to fence. Such was the German tradition amongst students, that, at any given time one student could challenge another student to a fencing duel. Though the



duels usually resulted in few serious injuries, other than the desired status of a cut on the cheek, to refuse a challenge was to suffer the pains of peer-group humiliation. Though he never had the need to test his fencing skills, he felt grateful to his Russian Bursch for teaching him the tricks of student German life.

Aside from the student corporation and fencing, student life in Germany was different in yet another way. Whereas in Russia, students were attending school with the strict intent of learning from their professors in their classrooms, in Germany that was not entirely the case. Much of the students' life was spent in Hofbrau's sipping coffee and drinking beer and discussing a variety of topics - social, political or even casual chatter. This form of 'learning' was new to Poniatoff but one in which after some time he became easy and comfortable.

Nonetheless, his primary interest was his academic pursuits. Though his course was to last five years, his impatience and ambition had him passing a equivalence exam which exempted him from two years of course work. At the end of his studies, to qualify for his degree he was also required to spend a year

out in the field learning the practical first-hand application of many of the theories and concepts of mechanical engineering. In one such factory he served as an apprentice in the design of a turbine locomotive. About this time, he began considering the possibility of staying on in Germany, after obtaining his degree, to acquire even more experience and knowledge of an operation, such as a turbine-engine factory. His plan being that, one day he would return to Russia and open a factory himself importing the machinery straight from Germany using his contacts. He stated his plans, as such, in a letter to his father, who replied that he thought the idea a good one.

Unexpectedly his plans were not to be. The rumors of war had been circulating throughout Karlsruhe and Germany, but one day the head of the turbine factory, called him in and warned him he better leave Germany as war with Russia seemed imminent. Alexander could hardly believe this rumor, for the simple reason that he realized how much the two countries depended on one another. Germany imported a great amount of raw materials from Russia including timber, grain and furs. Russia on the other hand, depended almost solely on Germany for all their manufactured goods; such as machinery, chemicals and drugs. To

Poniatoff a war between the two seemed unfeasible.

For the most part he ignored the warnings until finally, he decided to inquire about their gravity at the Russian consulate. As he approached the consulate, he noticed a black limousine warming up in the driveway. As he entered the building he met the Russian consulate on his way out. His inquiry as to the situation was met with a minimum of explanation and a hastened gesture which indicated to Poniatoff that the limousine was merely waiting to, hopefully, make real the consulates escape. Finally, the possibility of war between the two countries began to become a reality with Poniatoff and was soon confirmed as the declaration was made public in the evening newspaper.

Alexander returned to his room, which he had rented from a nice couple - a German man and his Russian wife. He realized to take more than just a small satchel would appear suspicious so he packed only a spare pair of underwear<sup>ear</sup> in a bag and took off. First he inquired as to the trains to Switzerland but was told that on account of the number of refugees and lack of food, the border was closed. His options were few. France and Germany were already at war so France was out. Belgium, therefore, seemed the most likely destination. It is ironic that Alexander's late start may have been a blessing



in disguise. For many Russians, foreseeing the danger of staying in Germany, fled early straight to the Russian border where, when war was declared they found themselves captured and imprisoned.

On his way through the streets of Karlsruhe, Alexander noticed that the stores and markets were already devoid of food and goods. As much of Germany's produce was imported, it was logical for people to buy up what they could while they could. This being the case, the threat of eventual food shortages seemed evident. With this realization in mind, Poniatoff reasoned that if the food shortages became severe, the last on the feeding priorities list would be prisoners. Just the thought of such a predicament made him shudder and caused him to hasten his step.

On the train to Belgium, the train stopped at a station where there was quite a commotion going on out on the platform. The man seated next to Poniatoff said he would go and find out what the disturbance was about. When he returned, he told Poniatoff, who fortunately now spoke German without a trace of an accent, that the crowd had caught two Russians and the police had 'tried to save the poor devils'. Again with the sounds of 'Deutschland Uber Alles' and the hordes of enlisting men surrounding him at every station the realization

of his great danger began to solidify in fear.

Towards the end of the trip he noticed two American women in his compartment having difficulty understanding the conductors instructions. After he had helped them to understand, they asked him if he was German. When he slowly shook his head indicating that he wasn't. They guessed again and again, French? Polish? Each time he gestured that he wasn't while wondering whether to confide in them. Finally he decided he would and whispered '<sup>Russe</sup> Russian' which they managed to translate to be Russian. Immediately, they sensed his predicament and motioned they would aid him in his escape; though he could not see how.

Several hundred feet before the border town of Aachen the train stopped and the passengers were instructed to alight and walk the rest of the way.

Poniatoff, as a form of courtesy, picked up two of the ladies heavier bags and carried them to the check point. As the first lady was asked of the nature of her trip, she indicated she was simply a tourist and named off the cities which had been on her itinerary- "Paris, Rome Viennia, Berlin". The next lady gave the exact same answer "Paris, Rome, etc. and was also allowed to pass through. When the guard came to Poniatoff, his stern question was met with just a blank stare. Of course, Poniatoff understood German perfectly but at this

moment he looked to the world like he didn't know a word. When he looked to one of the lady's as if besee<sup>ch</sup>king some linguistic aid, the lady pointed to the bags which were full of hotel stickers from these different cities and repeated, "Paris, Rome, Vienna, Berlin." The guard, however, was not so convinced and gave Poniatoff a long hard look until finally motioning him on. Poniatoff, whose very life had just been suspended precariously out in front of him, when allowed to pass through, experienced a very unusual sensation-He walked, but he could not feel the legs beneath him.

In Bruss<sup>ls</sup> he went to the Russian embassy which he found full of Russian tourists; most of whom had been vacationing on the Riviera when war was declared. Having just managed this narrow escape, Poniatoff couldn't help but smile at the familiar sight and sound of his fellow country<sup>men</sup> though many of the women and children were crying despondently. As he stood there, an elderly lady approached him and demanded sternly "What in this room could you possibly find amusing?" When Poniatoff explained the narrowness of his escape and the feeling of relief and communion he now felt for his fellow Russians, the



woman's anger waned and she walked silently away.

Poniatoff had but one address outside of Germany and that was in Brighton, England. Evidently a Russian friend of his in Germany had frequently gone there on holiday and had given Poniatoff the address just in case he ever 'needed a vacation'. Poniatoff found the Russian embassy in London to be in to be in a state of great confusion so he left this Brighton address in case they wished to contact him and headed down to the coast. Poniatoff spoke not a word of English so his sole means of communicating was to hold the scrap of paper up to a passer-by and then follow their pointed fingers and gestures. Eventually he arrived at the boarding house. Fortunately, as he was seen to discover the two <sup>Sisters</sup> ~~women~~ who ran the house had taken several holidays to Germany and Austria and so possessed an English-German dictionary. By this very laborious, but often intensely entertaining process of translation, they were able to communicate.

One morning he woke to bands blaring and people parading and shouting in the street. He soon learned that now England, also was at war with Germany and thereby an ally of Russias. He, therefore, reasoned that he might as well join the British forces, as there was no telling when he would return to Russia.

With the aid of the accomodating boarding house woman he found the enlisting office.

When the enlistment officers first few questions were met with blank, but eager stares, the officer deduced that the man could not speak English.

He told the woman that no one could enlist in the British army without a minimal command of the language and sent the man away. Poniatoff and the woman logically concluded, the best way of approaching this problem was to simply tutor him in English until he could qualify for the service. The woman took it upon herself to accomplish this task as her personal contribution to the war effort. Without delay she went out and recruited seven of her close friends and scheduled them in to teach an hour each day. That meant in addition to her and her sister, Poniatoff was scheduled for nine hours of intensive English a day. Needless to say, he learned the language quickly, though, some warm days he found the temptation to go swimming in the ocean just too great. His truancy was not taken at all lightly by his tutor, however, who roundly scolded him.

After five weeks, just when he was feeling adequately prepared for another enlistment attempt, he received a notice from the Russian embassy. The notice contained the directions and means for travelling to Newcastle, Scotland; where at a particular pier he would be expected to catch a boat to Bergen, Norway.

From there he would travel through Sweden and then Finland before finally reaching Russia. Though somewhat disappointed to disband his dream of fighting with the British forces, the chance now to return home to his own country easily outweighed his disappointment.

When he reached the pier in Newcastle he found several fellow Russians waiting to catch the boat, but no sign of a boat of any means to take them across the turbulent North Sea. Finally, after a few inquiries a man pointed to an old run-down fishing boat and indicated that it would be the one to take them across. This news was followed by a wave of protest from the fearful Russians, who were curtly informed that the Germans had sunk the more substantial boats and it was that one or nothing!

The voyage, as could have been expected, turned out to be extremely rough. Most all the passengers became extremely sea-sick. Poniatoff, himself, after holding up <sup>a</sup> while finally fell prey to the rocking and rollicking lulls of the ship and went up to the deck in hopes of clearing his nausea. As he was sitting in a deck chair, suddenly a loud blast nearly knocked him out of his seat and a large splash engulfed the bow of the boat. This blast was followed by yet another which landed to the small boats stern-again nearly swamping the vessel.

Though naturally expecting these splashes to be only errant shots of a German battleship, Poniatoff and the passengers were extremely relieved to discover these were merely the warning shots of a British destroyer. Soon a small row boat appeared and just as quickly disappeared as it bobbed and weaved its' way through the tremendous swells. Several sailors then scurried up the rope ladder lowered for them, made a quick check and surmised of the boats mission and just as quickly were disappearing again in their tiny boat. By this time, Poniatoff could make out the silhouettes of a fleet of seven ships. The sight of these powerful ships gliding silently out of sight left an everlasting impression on him.

When Poniatoff arrived back in Kazan, he made the appropriate effort to sign up for military service. Because of his educational level, it was expected that he would accordingly be designated an officer. As misfortune would have it, however, the consulate in Germany where he was required and where he had fulfilled his duty to record his student status, had failed to do so or had misplaced his record. His few protests proved futile and he was duly assigned to the lowest rung - the infantry. The infantry was filled with peasants and peoples from all over Russia. Many of his barrack mates were Uzbeks or Turkistanis from southern Russia whose habits and customs were much different from a northern



Russians. Especially at night, or in the early morning when these Muslim men got up to pray did Poniatoff find the situation intolerable. Fortunately he was stationed in Kazan where his sister and brother-in-law still lived. Therefore, together with his sister he devised a scheme which he hoped might solve this problem. One Sunday his sister put on a beautiful and bounteous picnic lunch to which Poniatoff invited his commanding officer. The officer was so impressed with the magnificence of the food and drink that when Poniatoff suggested the possibility of his spending nights at his sisters rather than the barracks, the man was in no mood to oppose.

With the escalation of the war effort in Europe, an order was put out for more available officers. Colonel Rinsky-Korsakov therefore, sent the promising Poniatoff to the Kazan Military Academy. There he was assigned to the coast artillery and eventually stationed in \_\_\_\_\_ on the Baltic Sea. It wasn't long before the young officer became intrigued with the most recent of wars' innovations - the airplane. He was later to discover that had he stayed at the Imperial College in Moscow he, no doubt, would have ended up working with a professor there who became famous for his design and engineering of these machines - Dr. Jukovsky. Poniatoff's infatuation with these mechanical



marvels led him to his commanding officer where he made a brash request to be transferred to the air division of the Imperial Navy. The officer laughed factiously at such a request, informing Poniatoff there was quite an impressive list of qualified candidates ahead of him and his chances were next to nil.

As would occur throughout his life, soon after an event occurred which was to provide him an unexpected opportunity. He, along with some other officers, including his commanding officer, was invited to the home of a local socialite for dinner. Evidently this woman was in love with the commanding officer and he with her; though at this point in their courtship commitments were vague and unsure. This woman was quite a woman of culture and entertained the men that evening with beautiful piano recitals. At the end of one of these pieces she got up and unexpectedly walked over and kissed the startled young officer, Poniatoff. Her intent, of course, being to make the commanding officer mad with jealousy. She so much succeeded in doing this, that the following week Poniatoff received his transfer papers to report to Brigittovka, Russias Imperial Naval Air base on the Caspian Sea.

Initially, he was assigned to huge flying boats made of plywood and which were used as bombers. His mechanical aptitude soon became apparent and he was asked to design armament for the lumbering craft. After testing 37 millimeter guns on piles of coal he successfully installed them on the flying boats. Poniatoff's curiosity and energy were hard to satisfy, however, as he constantly looked for a new project or challenge. At times his impatience and inability to sit idle put him at a disadvantage. Once while flying one of these flying boats on the Baltic, he was waiting out a storm when he impetuously decided to take off before the storm had subsided. As he recalls

"We were rolling along trying to build up air speed when we hit the top of a wave and the plane broke completely in half. It was quite a sensation."

Fortunately the speed he had attained was enough to carry him and his half of the plane to a nearby beach. When he reported to headquarters after this incident, instead of receiving a harsh reprimand, he was informed he was one of several pilots to be chosen as a combat pilot to test the new French fighter planes, the \_\_\_\_\_.

The prospect of testing the new planes excited him. While in training he received instruction's to take the craft into a spin, after first climbing to an altitude of 1500 meters. For some reason Poniatoff decided intuitively to take the plane to 3,000 meters to attempt the maneuver. Despite instructions to keep the controls in neutral, in order to pull out of the spin, he attempted to control the craft believing this would pull it out faster. The aircraft did not level off however. Instead it went into a reverse spin compounding Poniatoff's problems and panic. He remembers, "seeing nothing but sky spinning around me". Finally, I threw the controls in neutral and pulled out of the earthward spiral just a few feet from the roof tops of a village". The 1500 meter edge he had allowed himself in the maneuver had saved him from disaster.

Poniatoff never had the opportunity to fly the new plane in combat. Before he could be sent to the front, the Bolsheviks had taken power in Russia and the peace treaty was signed between Germany and the new government of Russia. Poniatoff, though now an officer of an air force division, now looked forward to resuming his pursuit of his mechanical interests. The Bolshevik

revolution, however, was spreading in Russia. One day an orderly informed him that a Communist propagandist was coming to the base. The orderly wished to know if Poniatoff was going to permit such a man to speak. Poniatoff replied that he would not only permit it, but would attend himself, so he could decide on his own whether the new ideology made sense to him. In his own mind, however, he was quite anxious to find contradiction and question the man on several points.

The ~~Communist~~ greeted the men and after offering a kind of general false complement as to 'the great opportunity to speak to such a bright and intelligent group,' suddenly slammed his fist down and denounced them all as 'idiots'. He condemned them for the idiocy of fighting a senseless war against the German people; who, he reminded them, were people just like their neighbors or friends. He explained that this war, like most, had merely been the fabrication of wealthy people who derived a vested interest in the war's economy. To Poniatoff, the man's argument was convincing. He, of course, realized the absurdity of fighting the Germans, many of whom had been his friends just months before. In fact, he had stopped and counted twelve Germans who had actually aided him in his escape. At the end, Poniatoff found nothing in the

speech to contradict. In fact, the man had touched upon a realization buried deep inside Poniatoff; which was that he had taken the war for granted-as something inevitable. This propogandist was now claiming that it was far from inevitable. For Poniatoff his statement rang true.

The Communist's propaganda took various other forms, however. Some of these were provoking such as the poster of the perspiring peasant ploughing the ground while six others representing Russians exploitive class-merchants and ministers - stood impatiently in the background holding spoons. The slogan "One with the plough and six with the spoon" in Russian translated into a rather catchy rhyme. As Poniatoff had grown up in a village and even at time had been part of the arduous process which culminates in producing bread to put onto people's plates, this poster made sense. The Communists employed other means of public persuasion which Poniatoff could not condone. Acts of violence, especially against the 'Kulak' class in Russia he found abhorrent. (Kuluk meaning 'fist' in Russian and connoting the oppressive nature of the ruling class). One of his brother-in-laws had been condemned and killed as a Kulak. His other brother-in-law, the carriage maker, was spared, solely for the reason that the Bolsheviks needed to retain some of these people to run and manage their factories and

more essential manufactured goods. Also, his father Matthew Poniatoff had all his forest land taken over by the state and was, therefore, stripped of his income potential.

On his way back to Aisha, he stopped in Kazan. There he met surreptitiously with a group of loyalist 'white' Russians who informed him that the organization of a 'white' army was in the making and that they would notify him when he could be of use. Before setting off to Aisha, Poniatoff happened to stop into a book store. This book store was of the old, out-of-the way, traditional sort, which despite the high rate of inflation during the previous few years, still had not raised their prices. Confronted with this grand opportunity to expand his knowledge, Poniatoff excitedly went from shelf to shelf picking out books. As he did so, he was faced with a personal dilemma. Which subject or areas of thought were most important to him, and to his future? With first the war with Germany and now the impending civil war his life was up in the air. His career as a mechanical engineer was now unsure. What and who was he to become? As a means of solving this question he picked out books from a variety of subject areas, paid the amazingly cheap bill and went home to Aisha.

One book which he bought and which he read when he got home, was the recent Russian translation of John Stuart Mill's book on political economy Principles of Political Economy. The book made a great impression on him. In short; Poniatoff understood Mill's Theory to be; for a stable economy to exist, it has to have a stable currency. The greatest means of assuring a stable currency was the necessity to allow the free enterprise system, of the survival of the fittest, to prevail. Any attempt to control or govern this process would endanger the currency's and <sup>th</sup>ereby the economy's stability. Poniatoff had seen glimpses of the economic prosperity in Europe and western Europe and believed the theory to be valid. In light of the Communists' ideology and success of making most enterprises state owned, Poniatoff's opinion came in rational and ideological opposition to the Bolshevik cause. He was ready to fight for the "white" army.

One day, somewhere off in the distance towards Kazan, he heard the sounds of canons firing. Immediately he realized the civil war had started, yet they had forgotten to notify him. His initial reaction was a sense of urgency. He was anxious to join the white army. He suddenly realized however, that if he rode to the sight of the battle he wouldn't know which side he would be riding into.

To ride into the Red's side with only his white documents would mean certain imprisonment, and possibly death. He quickly searched his mind for the best solution and soon came up with one. In Aisha, like in all the villages, the Communists had appointed a Commissar. The Commissar in Aisha was a modest peasant who, in fact, had done much work around the Poniatoff house. The man had gladly accepted the status and small stipend that the position of Commissar had afforded him. Poniatoff recruited this man to accompany him realizing that no matter what side they happened on they could produce the appropriate documents. As they approached the front lines, suddenly a brigade stepped out of the bushes and requested their documents. Just as suddenly, Poniatoff realized he did not recognize the man's uniform as being that of either the Red or White army. Doing his best to conceal his panic, he made a quick deduction. The soldier was wearing high leather boots which were finely polished so, therefore, Poniatoff figured the man to be more probably a member of the gentile white army. Poniatoff's risky guess and inherent intuition were greatly rewarded when he produced the appropriate "white" documents. He then convinced the guard that the commissar was nothing but a lowly peasant and should be allowed to return to his village.



Most of Poniatoff's and the white army's time during the civil war was spent in gradual retreat from the overwhelming Bolsheviks. While retreating through Kazan he stopped in the burning city to check on his sister and brother-in-law. He entered their home to find his sister standing helplessly with her two daughters. The girls, despite, the tentative state of the city and their lives, had just purchased their high school uniforms and were wearing them for the first time. Poniatoff's brother-in-law soon arrived and beseeched of him to take his daughters with him in his retreat. The father understood that if, in fact, they survived the Bolshevik take-over, their lives and their futures would never be what he had planned for them. He had, therefore, made the tough decision of gaining freedom for his daughters knowing that quite likely it would be the last time he would ever see them. Poniatoff agreed to take his nieces and wasting no time put them on a cassion heading east in retreat. As he was a pilot, he would hope to arrange to meet up with them at different towns and villages along the way. Sometimes he would fly to these places and other times he would accompany his plane which would be loaded onto a train to transport.

From Kazan he also flew east. As the Bolsheviks were close on his heels, Poniatoff realized he might not ever see his parents again. So, when he reached Aisha he swept down low and flew over the village several times. Both his mother and father came out of their house and waved frantically to their son until he was eventually forced to fly off. As it turned out, it would be the last time Poniatoff was to see his mother and father.

Though not realizing it at the time, his farewell act was to put his family in great danger. The Communists heard of this 'white' family and sent a commissar out to Aisha to imprison Matthew Poniatoff. Fortunately, in the village preceding Aisha on the road to Kazan, the <sup>e</sup>Commissar stopped for refreshment and happened to mention his mission in the tavern. A Tartar, and a friend and ex-employee of Mr. Poniatoff's overheard the man's intentions and rode off ahead to warn the family. Upon hearing of his peril, Matthew Poniatoff with the help of the Tartar's disappeared into the thick forest and hills around Aisha. He spent several months there until he felt assured that the Communists would take no vindictive action against him. Poniatoff's mother Agafia died shortly after this farewell. The cause of her death seemed to reflect the cause which was her life - helping other people. A case of typhoid broke out in the village

and as family members died left and right sometimes only one person was left with the disease but no one to care for them. Agafia Poniato<sup>e</sup>ff, never a person to put her own wants or will being above all else, did whatever she could to aid these people. In the process she consumed typhoid herself and died. The details of his family's misfortune and demise were afforded Poniato<sup>e</sup>ff only by means of bits and pieces of hearsay over the years. Though he did correspond with his sisters for several years, eventually the state put enough pressure on them that to correspond with a traitor, even though a brother, was a concession the Communists could not condone. Poniato<sup>e</sup>ff also learned that the family's unique two room log hut in Aisha was eventually turned into a school.

The retreat lasted nearly two years. Much of this time was spent in Siberia - hoping against hope for a white army revival. Many a cold night would find a group of pilots and soldiers huddled around a fire or wood burning stove entertaining each other with stories. The more remantic and exotic the stories the better the men responded. One pilot, in particular, Eugene Kostritsky, had originally fled to America when the Bolsheviks took power, but had returned when he heard word of the creation of a white army. He told countless stories of the beauty and wonder of a city in California called San Francisco.

Poniatoff listened intently to these stories and became captivated by the man's descriptions. Not only did he vow that someday he would reach San Francisco but something deep inside him hinted that his destiny would be there.

Very early one morning a 'white' scout came into the compound and announced that the Reds were closing in. The commanding officer, a good and courageous man, none-the-less, chose to make light of the warning and opt for an extra hour of sleep. Poniatoff, catching wind of the warning, intuitively decided there was no time to waste and took off on his own. Fortunately for him he did so, as he was soon to hear that the commanding officer and many of his fellow soldiers were captured by the Reds. Not long after, word arrived that Admiral Kolchak, Chief Commanding Officer of the White forces in Siberia and his military staff, had been routed and killed by the Red forces. The bitter struggle was finally over.



At the time of the white army's collapse, Poniatoff was in a place called  
in Manchuria.  
Harbin. Though close to China, Harbin was under Russian control and therefore,  
as a white soldier, he was still very much in danger. It was<sup>a</sup> well known  
fact that the Communists showed little mercy for their captive countrymen.  
Pilots, in particular were known to undergo terrible tortures before eventually  
being killed. Together with another pilot Poniatoff decided their best move  
would be to take a train to the port of Dairen from where they could catch a  
ship which could take them to Shanghai. They realized that their technical  
talents would have greater chances of employment in a commercial center such  
as Shanghai, as opposed to a rural Chinese village. At ~~one~~<sup>the</sup> train station,  
Poniatoff discovered that westerners were not allowed to ride 3rd class on  
Chinese trains. Upon checking however, Poniatoff discovered he hadn't enough  
money for a first class ticket. By chance his companion had just enough to  
pay for both of them and they succeeded in making their escape.

They arrived in Shanghai around dusk. Stepping off the boat they realized  
they had absolutely nothing. They couldn't speak Chinese or English. They  
didn't know a soul in this great bustling city. They didn't have jobs, or a

place to stay and very little money. Despite this situation of being stripped of all worldly possessions and associations, Poniatoff felt elated. The relief of just narrowly escaping being captured by the Reds, far outweighed any of the inconveniences to which he might now be subjected. As they wandered aimlessly through the streets, out of nowhere a Russian man, obviously recognizing the uniforms of the recent refugees, approached them and offered them accomodation at his boarding house. For the two estranged soldiers this man seemed a true God-send.

The boarding house, as they were to discover the following morning <sup>r</sup>ound the large communal breakfast table, was filled with a wide range of Russian society. Seated next to him, in fact, were two men of some distinction. One man had married the daughter of one of Moscow's leading merchants. His wife was also seated at the table conspicuously wearing possibly the only wealth they were able to retain - her jewelry. The other man, had been the head engineer of a large gold mine where he had earned the fantastic wage of 20,000 rubles a year; none of which was available to him now.

The two men were discussing their idea of setting up a Russian newspaper. With the growing number of incoming refugees they realized some means of communication would be of great aide to the refugee community. One of them mentioned

he knew of an available building but it was without electricity and they would have to hire someone to wire it up. Poniatoff couldn't help but overhear and, after cordially excusing his eaves dropping, offered to do this electrical work for them. Of course, he had never done electrical work in his life, but he figured it couldn't be "too tough to learn". The men paid Poniatoff 15 Shanghai dollars (50¢) for his work which seemed to him like a small fortune at the time. Somehow, the meager amount of English Poniatoff had learned, became apparent to the two men and they realized the great need they had for an English to Russian translator. After all, most of the press releases were those from Reuter of England. They, therefore, hired Poniatoff to translate these into Russian which he wound up doing mostly by use of a English to Russian dictionary.

One of these enterprising men also opened a commission business, which was meant to be an aide to fellow Russians, in addition to being profitable for himself. One service he provided, was finding rooms and places for people to rent. One such room he unknowingly rented to a man, who, discovered after a short stay that the building was to be demolished. When the renter threatened to

take legal action against the man, instead of fighting the case he asked Poniatoff if he would consider buying the business. When Poniatoff asked the price, the man quoted \$60, which seemed a reasonable price to Poniatoff, but one which he still needed to pay for on an installment basis.

After putting a few notices out advertising his business, one day a Russian sea captain walked into his office. The captain said he had just escaped from Vladivostok with a large cargo of timber and could Poniatoff find a buyer for him. In looking for a broker, Poniatoff met a successful American business man named Suffert who agreed to buy the timber. Suffert had made a great fortune in Shanghai importing steel from the U.S. and building great sky scrapers in the city. After the completion of the deal, Poniatoff was pleasingly shocked to find that his intermediary role had earned him a \$900 commission. What turned out to be even more beneficial to Poniatoff than the money, was the inadvertent trust he had gained from Suffert. The American offered him, for free, an office in one of his beautiful new buildings and Poniatoff gratefully accepted.

Some time later this same Mr. Suffert entered Poniatoff's office one morning with the morning paper. In it was an advertisement issued by the



Shanghai Power Company looking for an electrical designer, for which Suffer<sup>f</sup>t suggested he apply. When Poniatoff revealed his pessimistic chances of obtaining such a position - especially when he could hardly speak the language, Suffer<sup>ff</sup>t offered to make the appointment for him.

As chance would have it, the supervisor to whom he reported happened to be Swiss-born and so therefore, the two could speak German. The man admitted candidly to Poniatoff that there was another applicant, a Chinese fellow, who had just graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston. The eventual selection would be made only after both of them had worked a month. Then, the supervisor asked Poniatoff what he would be expecting in the way of salary. This posed quite a dilemma for the 28 year old Russian. His desire to land the job at any cost led him to think \$50 a month. Then he considered that possibly he was valuing himself too low and so he decided to quote a wage of \$100. Before he could declare his price the supervisor asked if \$280. a month would suffice. Poniatoff, trying his best not to over react, nodded his head in passive dumb-struck agreement.



It didn't take long for the brilliance of Poniatoff's technical mind nor the warmth and compatibility of his good nature to establish itself at the power company. One day a top British engineer came to Poniatoff with a set of plans and a problem he was working on. The man was a pipe smoker and as he quickly mumbled through the instructions, Poniatoff was only able to speculate as to what the man wanted done. A week later, when he produced the finished plans of what he had thought the man desired, the man indicated that Poniatoff's solution was not at all what he was after. The man was so impressed with what he had accomplished, however, that he immediately hired Poniatoff as his assistant.

This position was a grand leap of status for Poniatoff - one not without its difficulties however. Suddenly he was the superior to people who had just prior been his superiors. One such person was a fellow Russian engineer who had been at the Power Company long before Poniatoff had arrived. Even more than this, he was the son of a wealthy railroad man in Russia and presumed his superiority over the common villager. When Poniatoff was forced to ask some work of this man, he ignored the request. His refusal was immediately taken up by the pipe-smoking Englishman who adeptly quelled the rebellious Russian's insolence. Poniatoff never again heard a complaint from the man.

All this time, Poniatoff was awaiting his visa to go to America; his dreams and ambitions to make the city of San Francisco a reality still a strong one in him. As the visa was delayed, he resigned himself ever more to settled life in Shanghai. Part of the requisite for a westerner settling in this highly stratified society was to have the appropriate number of servants. As a rule, five were required. A house boy who, in general ran the household, an assistant to him, a cook, a cook's help and a maid. It was understood by the westerners that it was not wise to publicly indulge in any kind of menial task or chore or the Chinese would assume that this was a sure sign that the person had been a 'koolie' in his former culture. Life in Shanghai, therefore, was made comfortable and easy.

Life in Shanghai began changing in other ways for Poniatoff - in a more personal and deeper way. Possibly, part of the effect of arriving in this new city and environment without any of the attachments or affiliations with ones prior culture, is the opportunity one is afforded to develop a new identity. As mentioned Poniatoff had always felt the personal need to pursue and eventually succeed as a businessman. His father had instilled this in him. Lying dormant under this conditioning, however, existed the spirit and faith which had been his

mothers nature, and which had also influenced him. Coupled with this was the realization that the supposed ideal life-style of a good paying job a fine home and a chance to go out to the movies every so often was not enough for him. He therefore, began exploring other interests.

Frequently, he would make trips to the various bookstores in Shanghai, pulling out books which he felt, might give him more insight into man's, as well as his own, nature. Usually he would devote Sunday mornings to going to the Shanghai botanical gardens where he could browse and read in this quiet sanctuary. For Poniatoff, the gardens were his church. It was here he began feeling the inspiration of Christian Larson's book "How The Mind Works" or John Harvey Kellogg book \_\_\_\_\_.

These men's words touched upon a deep yearning Poniatoff possessed to know and understand himself better. He read the words slowly and mediated<sup>+</sup><sub>^</sub> upon their meaning.

Sometime later, through unusual and even adverse circumstances another influential book came into Poniatoff's possession. In the plague of 1922, he contracted yellow fever. For several weeks he was laid up in the hospital fighting



the fever of this dreaded disease. One evening, an Englishman in his ward, also suffering from the disease, handed him a book and some advise. He prophesized that the following night would be Poniatoffs night of crises, where the disease would reach its' ultimate point. If he could survive this night, he would survive the disease. The book he handed Poniatoff was a book called Natural Cure<sup>s</sup> by a Swedish-American named H. Lindlahr. The book's primary message is that man should look more to nature's and not medicines ability to heal their ails. The book so inspired Poniatoff that he vowed whenever he had the chance he would make further study of this subject. Poniatoff suffered his crisis night, and, of course, survived it. The Englishman unfortunately did not fare as well that same evening he passed away.

Many of Poniatoff's Russian friends managed to acquire a visa before him. Many of these people sailed to the U.S. only to return some months later with dismal reports. They claimed that life in America was not a "bowl of peaches" as reputed. On the contrary, they had found themselves working long hard hours at a factory only to come home and fix their own meals and take care of their own homes. At least in Shanghai, they could count on having these menial chores

done for them. Poniatoff was not dissuaded by these reports and the moment he received his visa he set sail. In his company was a \$2,000 bonus the Power Company had given him and a glowing letter of introduction to an influential person at the General Electric Company in New York.

Poniatoff wasn't sure he wanted to pursue a technical career any longer. His plan upon arriving in the fabled city of San Francisco, was to look into the prospect of farming in this great modernized land of America. Before he could even disembark and look into this possibility, an incident occurred which nearly ended whatever hopes he had for life in America.

Just outside of San Francisco the ship was boarded by the customs officials. Poniatoff, along with the rest of the passengers lined up to undergo what he considered simply a routine check. When the official looked at Poniatoff's ticket, however, he immediately stamped it 'void' and was told that he would be let off at Angel Island where he would catch the next ship sailing back to Shanghai. Poniatoff, nearly numb beyond belief, asked pleadingly with the man if he could kindly explain the reasons for the refusal; to which the man gestured toward the long line of still-to-be inspected passengers and mumbled something to the effect there was 'no time'; Poniatoff was dumbfounded.



Here he had waited seven long years to reach this destiny and with a single wave of impatience he was not only going to fail in his dream, he was not even going to know why. As he sat crushed and helpless with this news, he wondered what recourse he might have. Several minutes later, the same customs official, obviously having finished the inspection sooner than expected, came walking by the down-trodden Russian. Poniatoff seized the man and begged him to please tell him the reason he had been refused. The official reluctantly agreed and told Poniatoff that they were instructed not to allow in any passenger whose ticket had been purchased by a municipality. As Poniatoff's ticket had been purchased for him by the city - owned Power Company, he had fallen into that category. When Poniatoff asked the reason for this rule the man hesitated and then admitted that the means by which many foreign cities had solved the problem of their overstocked jail cells would be to buy prisoners a ticket and send them to America. Eventually, the reason for the influx of so many of these rougher elements of society became apparent to U.S. officials, and this crack-down was ordered. Poniatoff, hearing this news anxiously informed the custom's man that he was not a prisoner. When the man asked if he had any proof of that, Poniatoff desperately searched his belongings until he remembered his Shanghai Municipal

Council contract. The fact is, before leaving Shanghai, when he was discarding all non-essential items, he initially had thrown this contract out. A strong feeling he recalls, urged him to save the contract and for no other reason, he had retrieved it from the wastebasket and packed it. This document proved enough to convince the man. So, taking a deep sign of relief, Poniatoff stepped off the ship onto the dock in San Francisco.

Poniatoff's desire to become a farmer in technologically advanced America was dealt a severe set-back when he journeyed north of San Francisco to the area around Petaluma. There was a group of Russian emigrants living and most of them farming in this area. Much to Poniatoff's shock, these farmers were no more advanced than many of the peasants around Aisha. Contrary to the push-button techniques he had expected, these farmers worked long laborious hours. He, therefore, took the bonus money he had been given and set off on a cross continental bus tour of the country. He made stops in Los Angeles, Denver, Chicago, Washington and New York.<sup>2</sup> (Contrary to his <sup>initial</sup> view of Petaluma, Poniatoff couldn't help but marvel at how prosperous most of the nation seemed to be.) One of his more note worthy stops was a specific stop-over in Battle Creek, Michigan

where he stopped to talk and pay homage to the author of \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_, John Harvey Kellogg. Kellogg was pleased and actually  
shocked to receive a man who had experienced his work from such a far away  
outpost. Kellogg reaffirmed to Poniatoff his philosophy of a natural  
vegetarian diet and again Poniatoff vowed someday he would make his own study  
of this subject.

Poniatoff presented his letter to G.E. in Schenectady, New York and was  
hired as an engineer. He was immediately assigned to a circuit breaker  
design group. At his first meeting with some other engineers Poniatoff was  
befuddled by the technical terms that these fast-speaking Americans thrust  
at him. He said nothing at his first meeting, but he took lots of notes. At  
the end of the day, he went straight to the public library to decipher the  
complicated terms he had written down at the meeting. Much to his surprise  
and delight the librarian was a Russian and the man took Poniatoff under his  
wing. It was a full month before he felt confident enough to contribute at  
these meetings but when he finally did speak, they found the Russian engineer  
had much to say.



A year later with two patents now issued in his name, he was called into the office of Mr. Rankin, the head of the department. He was informed he would be a project engineer on a new vacuum type circuit breaker. Poniatoff realized the challenge of this project and for one of the few times in his life, hesitated before accepting the assignment. He also knew that there were engineers of much higher status who could have been given this project so Poniatoff asked Mr. Rankin why he had been selected. The man smiled and replied, "These engineers, because of their great experience, already know that it cannot be done. You are not smart enough yet to know it is impossible and that's the reason I selected you!"

Poniatoff successfully completed the vacuum circuit assignment and in return he was awarded his own lab; a goal many engineers work their entire lives to attain. Despite the status and security of his position with G.E., he sensed somewhere deep inside him that his destiny was not in New York but in California. Therefore, in 1930, in the depths of the depression, he left Schenectady and returned to San Francisco. His desire was to work in the development of new products. For several weeks he walked the streets looking for this kind of work-his determination was so strong. Because of the

depression, he was unable to find any research and development work. Few companies were risking investment capital on the future. He, therefore, accepted the one job that was available to him at the time an engineer with the Pacific Gas & Electric Company. He never lost sight of his goal of doing research-oriented work, however, and in his spare time continued to seek such work.

One day he was in the office of Wesley Hicks of Wessix Corporation explaining to him his desire for research work. Hicks nearly laughed Poniatoff out of the office at the mention of a position in new product design. He also implied that Poniatoff was 'a damn fool' for seeking such work in the depression and if he were smart he'd stay put at P.G. & E. As Poniatoff was headed for the door, Hicks called him back, however, and mentioned that he had heard of 'this crazy fellow around the corner' who was known to be still pursuing such risks.

Poniatoff followed the man's directions to Dalmo Company and was soon sitting in the office of its president, Irving Moseley. Moseley explained <sup>to</sup> ~~that~~ him *That*

*his* company was developing small electrical appliances. In his eagerness to pursue this type of work, Poniatoff offered right off to work his first three months without pay and if they weren't happy with him, they could let him go.

Moseley realized he could scarcely lose with this type of arrangement and agreed to the deal.

At the time, Dalmo was in the midst of manufacturing permanent wave machines. They were encountering some problems as the temperature controls of the machine created a radio interference. Plus, the waves produced were not as permanent as desired. Poniatoff jumped at the challenge of this project. They converted a room in a beauty parlor and advertized permanent waves free of charge! In time after several hair do's (and some don'ts) he was able to solve the problem.

← Moseley patented the new controls in Poniatoffs name. Later the patent was sold and Poniatoff received a portion of the income from the patent.

Though this success should have secured his position with Dalmo, an incident occurred which put it in jeopardy. Dalmo had been developing an electric razor and finally when they put the product on the market, they discovered they had a patent infringement suit from Schick the major manufacturer of electric shavers.

Dalmo lost the case and was forced to reduce expenditures in development work. Poniatoff, though not asked to leave, realized Moseley's problems and told him he would return to P.G.&E. until the time when Dalmo could once again afford to hire him.



About this time, Poniatoff met his wife to be Helen Hess. Poniatoff was in need of a dentist and after going to several he hadn't liked had one recommended to him by his old friend Eugene Kotrinsky. Kotrinsky was the same pilot who had originally, in the cold winter nights in Siberia, told Poniatoff about the wonders of San Francisco. Poniatoff went to the dentist but found, much to his concern, that in the midst of working on his teeth, the dentist would pause to speak to someone 'above'. Finally Poniatoff felt the need to inquire after these mysterious conversations, and the dentist informed him that he possessed telepathic powers and was communicating with some past relative or another. After telling Poniatoff of his powers, the dentist looked long and hard at him and suggested that he attend his fellow telepathics meeting in Berkeley that night. Poniatoff politely declined the invitation but then the dentist became adamant that he attend as he insisted, it would be "in his interest".

Half reluctantly, Poniatoff made the effort of taking a trolley car down to the ferry, caught the ferry across the bay to Berkeley and finally made it to the meeting. He listened intently but actually felt no earth-shattering effects of any of it. Afterwards, he was approached by two young ladies who engaged

him in conversation. When they asked how he proposed to get home to San Francisco, they mentioned that they, too, were headed there, had a car and would he like a ride. On the ride back the three enjoyed a very lively conversation; with Poniatoff being particularly taken with the friend of the driver. Eventually, the two made arrangements to meet again and their romance was on. The woman, as it turned out was Helen Hess of San Jose. The two were married in \_\_\_\_\_ and set up their first home in Mill Valley. Later she was to confide to him that the reason her and her friend had picked him out of the crowd at the telepathy meeting was that he had looked 'the most normal' of everyone there. Nonetheless whatever the reason, the strong suggestion by Poniatoff's dentist that it would be in his interests " " proved to be true.

Still eager for product development, Poniatoff went to work for Westinghouse in Sunnyvale, South of San Francisco. He moved down the peninsula and together with his wife put in much of the labor and all of the design for their house in Redwood City. The year was 1942 and America's involvement in the war was escalating each day. One day he received a call from Moseley. Moseley explained how he and Dalmo-Victor (The Victor part of Dalmo had been

added as a result of \_\_\_\_\_,

<sup>the</sup>  
~~One~~ son of the inventor of the phonograph, coming to work at Dalmo.), had managed to acquire a contract to develop air borne radar scanners for the Navy.

According to the contract, a prototype of the scanner had to be completed in 100 days. As other large manufacturers like G.E. and Bell Lab were also competing for the contract, Poniatoff's technical ability would be greatly needed.

Poniatoff accepted the offer. The project group worked day and night on the project, some times not shaving for days at a time. Finally, by the dead line date, they had constructed a model which they felt met the requirements. When the navy inspected the models they told everyone to go home except for Moseley. Though, before they could committ themselves completely to him, they admitted they would have to do some checking up on him as he had essentially 'come out of the woods'.

Two of the components required in the Dalmo airborne radar system were specialized motors and generators. Moseley was finding it virtually impossible to find these from existing sources. Therefore, he suggested to Poniatoff that he establish his own company and begin by manufacturing the two needed components.



Poniatoff, who had never before dreamed or even considered starting his own company, initially balked at Moseley's suggestion. Moseley convinced Poniatoff that there was little risk involved as Dalmo would serve as a ready customer. Also, Moseley realized that no one understood the product better than Poniatoff- one of its original designers. So with just a handful of men and limited resources, Poniatoff took over the abandoned furniture loft above the <sup>Vickor</sup> Dalmo plant in San Carlos, California and founded the Ampex Electric and Manufacturing Company. Ampex being an anagram for his three initials and the "ex" an abbreviation for excellence. The date was November 1, 1944. Poniatoff was now 52 years of age; an age when most men are planning their retirement, Poniatoff was starting his own company. A company which in the next few decades would pioneer much of the electronic development in this country.

A major factor in Ampex' success was that "ex" trait which Poniatoff maintained. As he admits "anything I do has to be just right". In making the motors and generators he experimented and decided instead of using the usual magnet wire he would try barb wire which turned out to be much more effective. Towards the close of the war a Navy pilot, visited the Ampex plant and related an experience he had encountered. While flying a night mission he was suddenly startled to find all forward guns on his plane open fire and seconds later see a Japanese plane, engulfed in flame, spiraling toward the sea.

The guns in the plane had been activated by the radar. The components had been made by Ampex. As a form of sincere gratitude and to boost war morale this pilot was sharing this story with the employees of Ampex. Soon the efficiency of Ampex components became so reputable among Navy pilots that many would refuse to go up unless checking first and making sure the components were Ampex-made. In almost an unprecedented move, the Navy decided to make Ampex its' single supplier; in spite of military rules that there must be a minimum of two manufacturers for all critical items.

When the war ended, Ampex took a few days off to celebrate the end and the victory. Several days later, the Navy cancelled their contract with Ampex. Now, of course, Poniatoff had nothing to manufacture and, therefore, no reason to keep the company going. Business friends and associates strongly advised him to dissolve the company as they felt Ampex had no chance to survive. In their opinion, with insufficient capital, no marketable peacetime product and very little business experience, Poniatoff would not be able to compete with old established companies. Despite realizing the logic of this advice, Poniatoff refused to fold up. Finally, after several sleepless nights, Poniatoff made the decision to maintain the personnel and organization of Ampex and hopefully



come across a peace time product to develop.

It wasn't only Poniatoff who experienced several sleepless nights but without question many of his employees. As Florence James, <sup>his</sup> ~~her~~ personal secretary of 25 years recalls, "We were all sitting on the edge of our seat Monday morning waiting for his decision; and ready to work on any project. We were all so relieved and happy when he decided to keep the company going." She recalls that, "There was something special about working at Ampex...people loved it and nearly stood in line wanting a chance to work there!" She feels it was Mr. Poniatoff's presence and spirit which created this atmosphere; as she insists 'people can always tell if a person's sincere and when Mr. Poniatoff walked through the plant and talked with employees, people felt his genuine interest in their work as well as in them as people." Poniatoff, himself admits that the main reason he decided to keep the company going was that he could not bear to say good-bye to the Ampex people who had worked with him so successfully.

As fate would have it, just as the working situation was becoming desperate, a man representing a furnace company visited Ampex. The man wanted Ampex to bid on the construction of motors to be used in the furnace. Despite desiring the business, Poniatoff warned the man that the quality of the motors Ampex

was equipped to manufacture, would be too expensive for the customers application. Despite Poniatoff's admonition, the man insisted that Ampex bid anyway. The price Ampex quoted turned out to be four times the cost of these motors prior to the war. Disregarding the high cost, Ampex received an order for 10,000 units. Repeat orders for an additional 50,000 motors kept the production group at Ampex busy until they could begin work on the new Ampex product.

"In the early days of our company," states Poniatoff, "whenever a serious problem arose, some unexpected event appeared on the horizon providing the opportunity to solve the problem."

At this stage of Poniatoff's small company, there surely seemed to be more problems than opportunities. A series of events and amazing co-incidences were soon to reverse this trend, however. The source of this change may have actually originated back in the small village of Aisha. It was there that on quiet summer evenings young Poniatoff used to listen to the beautiful violin music coming from the Tartar homes on the other side of the river. Though the Russian music was predominantly the accordion, it was the sweet lilting strings of the violin which he most dearly loved. After he arrived in America Poniatoff



discovered the records of the Russian composer Ippolitov-Ivanov, whose compositions were Tartar influenced. Poniatoff, from the love of this music, considered ways by which this music could be more <sup>accurately</sup> ~~acutely~~ recorded.

It happened that early in Ampex' development, Poniatoff hired a brilliant young man named Forrest Smith. Smith shared a similar love for classical music and with their mutual interests in common, Poniatoff decided to explore the development of a high fidelity system. Coinciding with this development, working down below them at Dalmo Victor was an engineer named Harold Lindsay. Lindsay also had a keen interest in classical music and eventually Lindsay and Smith happened to express and share their interest with each other.

One day Lindsay mentioned to Smith a most interesting demonstration he had witnessed at an Institute of Radio Engineers meeting in San Francisco. A young man by the name of Jack Mullins had evidently brought a 'memento' back from Germany after the war which he felt had great significance. The "memento" happened to be a German magnetophone. Mullins had originally taken an interest in the instrument while stationed in England during the war. As a Signal Corps officer his duty had been to monitor German radio broadcasters. He realized that often times he could pick up broadcasters of symphony concerts, but oddly

enough, in the early hours of the morning. It didn't take much for Mullins to deduct that these couldn't be 'live' performances, but must have somehow been recorded. There was other evidence that the Germans had some new high quality recording techniques. Broadcasters of speeches by Hitler and other Nazi officials were heard in one town and city after another, as to camouflage their whereabouts, but it was obvious to the Signal Corps engineers that they couldn't possibly be moving around so fast. The "live-sounding" broadcast<sup>S</sup>ers had to involve some improved recording method.

After the war, Mullins went to France with the Signal Corps after V-E Day and obtained permission to go to Germany to investigate the German recording techniques. Mullin discovered a black trunk, about the size of a foot-locker, designed for the Germans by Telefunken and called a magnetophon. Mullin knew this bizaare box to be the source of the live-sounding broadcasts he had heard in London, and realized it could be of great interest back in the U.S.

Sometime later Forest Smith introduced Lindsay to Poniatoff. Lindsay excitedly told Poniatoff of this magnetophon and greatly aroused his interest; as it had become obvious to Poniatoff that phonograph discs for recording music



were his systems weakest link. Poniatoff immediately tried to contact Mullins, but was told he was on his way to Los Angeles to give the demonstration there. Poniatoff sensing this machine's significance, hopped right in his car and drove down to meet Mullins himself. Poniatoff met Mullins and expressed both his interest in the machine and hiring Mullins as a consultant. Mullins told Poniatoff that he had already committed himself as a consultant. Evidently another Signal Corps officer, Colonel Richard Ranger, had also brought back a magnetophon and was working on a project to develop and manufacture a professional tape recorder. He had hired Mullins.

Despite this set-back Poniatoff made a firm decision at this time to pursue and develop a high fidelity tape recorder. He went straight down to his old friend Irving Moseley at Dalmo Victor and told him he would like to hire Lindsay for this project. Moseley had no objections. So on December 10, 1946 Lindsay accepted a position at Ampex. His first task was to design a magnetic head for the proposed Ampex tape recorder.



After testing various laminations and hydrogen annealing of high permeability alloys, Lindsay came up with a head that he and Poniatoff took to San Francisco to test on Mullins magnetophon. As Lindsay says today, "The most exciting moment of my life was just before I pushed the button. It seemed as though everything rested on whether it worked-our personal futures-and the future of Ampex." The new head worked perfectly and Poniatoff had full confidence that Ampex could make a tape recorder of its own.

Lindsay was put in charge of the design of the first recorder which was given the designation Model 200. The objective was to design equipment for top performance with the highest reliability. Little consideration was given to what the cost of the unit might be. The total expenditure in building the first working prototype was \$76,000. a heavy financial burden to Ampex during this period. The unit alone they estimated cost \$3,000. to produce so they decided they would sell it for \$4,000.

The market for such equipment initially looked bleak, indeed. In fact their first two sales, were to two individuals both millionaires with little concern for cost. The future of Model 200, appeared to be very short-lived.

Once again, however an unforeseen opportunity presented itself.

This time the origins of this opportunity developed out of the Bing Crosby Philco radio broadcasts. Bing's broadcasts had always been one of ABC's most popular. Originally, Bing had done these broadcasts live but later he would typically go into the studio and record an hour long show which the engineers would then cut down to half an hour. The trouble was the disc-to-disc dubbing and editing. It was of poor quality and got worse with each transcription-inspite of the fact that ABC was using the finest disc recording equipment. The agreement between Bing and ABC was that if, and when, his Hooper ratings dropped below 60, he would have to go back on the air live. Bings ratings did just that and the crisis was on. As Bing felt uncomfortable with this 'live' arrangement, he desperately looked around for alternatives.

Eventually Crosby Enterprises heard about Jack Mullens and his work with the magnetophon and contacted him. Mullins and Colonel Ranger, as it turned out, had had little luck in developing a reliable recorder. Mullins, realizing Ampex was further ahead in their development recommended them to Crosby,

Crosby Enterprises, therefore, contacted Poniatoff and the next thing anyone knew, Lindsay and Smith were down in Hollywood demonstrating the machine for Crosby himself. When 'the crooner' heard the recorder's results, he knew immediately that this machine was exactly what he was looking for. The engineers at A.B.C. were much less optimistic and asked Poniatoff himself to come down for a demonstration. In the end, they decided that employment of the tape was simply too risky; their fear being, if the tape broke, valuable air time would be lost. Crosby, himself took up the battle and threatened A.B.C. if they didn't give these machines a try, he would negotiate with a network who would. Finally A.B.C. conceded.

#### Grillo

Immediately after this Basil Grillo, manager of Crosby Enterprises, on the instructions of Bing, paid a call on Poniatoff at Ampex. Grillo admitted his lack of knowledge in the area but knew he was supposed to negotiate for some of these Model 200 units. After a brief discussion, Poniatoff, himself not sure of what to offer, stepped out to consult with Lindsay and his office manager McSharry<sup>rry</sup>. They decided to make it worth Ampex' while, they would have to build 20 of these units for a cost of \$4,000 each. As Ampex had such meager finances to even begin such a production, they also decided to ask

for a deposit of \$60,000 for the machines. At this offer, Grillo merely hunched his shoulders saying, "if its' what Bing wants, I'll agree to it".

Despite the skepticism of the ABC engineers, Crosby used the machine. Some nine months later Poniatoff received the following letter.

"Commencing April 25, 1948, and continuing through September 25, 1948.

(a total of twenty-two weeks) the American Broadcasting Company in Chicago recorded on the Ampex; approximately seventeen hours per day. For these 2618 hours of playback time, the air time lost was less than three minutes: a truly remarkable record. We believe that a large share of the successful operation was due to the use of the Ampex tape recorder manufactured by your company. We wish to thank you for your splendid cooperation in supplying us with this fine piece of equipment capable of withstanding the severe condition imposed during our delayed savings time program."

Very truly yours,

Frank Marx, V.P. in Charge of Engineering  
American Broadcasting Company

Eventually 112 of the original Model 200 units were built and sold.

Crosby Enterprises drew up a contract by which they would buy and be the sole distributor of these machines. They bought the units for \$4,000 and sold them for \$5,000. Poniatoff seemed happy enough with this arrangement but

his 'silent partner' was not. In fact, when together they consulted the balance sheet they realized that the company was nearly broke. The partner, therefore suggested that Poniatoff abandon the project and move on to something else.

Poniatoff, in spite of the logic of his partner and the facts facing him on the pessimistic balance sheet, decided to stick with it. He sensed there was a future in this area of technology. His partner, as a means of determining the matter hired five top experts in the field and paid them to make a study of the possibilities. Unanimously, the five decided there was no future in the magnetic tape recording business. When Poniatoff decided still to ignore their conclusion, his 'silent partner' asked Poniatoff to find someone to buy him out. Poniatoff was again in a quandary.

As co-incidence would have it, about this time a wealthy insurance man named Joe McMicking, an American living in the Phillipines, contacted Fran Lechfield of the First National Bank of Redwood City (later to become Wells



Fargo). He asked Leitchfield if he knew of any company involved in new product design. Lechfield told him of Poniatoff and Ampex and shortly the two met. In the course of looking into the possibilities of financing this new company, McMicking took Poniatoff and several of Ampex' top employees to a grand luncheon at the Sir Frances Drake Hotel in San Francisco, Forrest Smith, Ampex' bright young manager, realizing the significance of gaining this man's financial support made a strong effort to familiarize Joe McMicking with Ampex' intentions and development. So impressed was he with Smith that much later McMicking confided in Poniatoff that if Forrest Smith had not been the manager, chances are he would have never lent his support.

The first question McMicking asked Poniatoff, after they had established their affinity, was how much he needed to get 'the ball rolling'. Poniatoff thought and then in a show of true naivete, quoted \$25,000. Fortunately for Poniatoff, McMicking was an experienced businessman. His usual reaction to quotes of this nature was to multiply the figure by 10. In a case such as this one he would normally set aside a quarter of a million dollars. In Ampex' case

however, McMicking foresaw the magnitude of the venture they were about to undertake and set aside \$365,000. A sum which Poniatoff admits he was just as glad to find out about later as he's not sure if he would have had the nerve to ever risk that much money.

McMicking was not just an astute businessman, but one of enthusiasm as well. His insight into business decisions or problems was coupled with his contagious confidence in Ampex pioneering efforts with recording. One of the first decisions he made was to extract the company from their contract with Crosby Enterprises as the sole distributor of the Model 200 machines. He felt that Ampex could not afford to have their hands tied by such a restricting arrangement.

With this new financial influx. the Ampex engineers began the task of developing a new machine - Model 300. With their now considerable knowledge of recording techniques, they were ~~now~~ out to develop a recorder with lower tape speed and lower production cost, while retaining the same high quality performances. Initially Harold Lindsay was again named as project engineer.

This time, the project group had a built-in dead line which was the meeting of the National Association of Broadcasters Standards which was to be held in July of 1949 in New York City.

After several weeks on the project Forrest Smith came to Poniatoff and asked if he could possibly relieve Lindsay as the projects manager. Smith sensed that there was no way Lindsay could complete the project by the upcoming date. Poniatoff called Lindsay in and as he would say 'frankly told him of Smith's desire to take on the project' and Poniatoff's decision to allow him the opportunity. Fortunately, Lindsay conceded. After several weeks had passed, however, Poniatoff could see that Smith was not making the kind of progress he had expected. Poniatoff, therefore, called Smith in and again with personal candor, pointed out the short-comings of his attempts and informed Smith he was going to reassign Lindsay to the project. As Lindsay had done, Smith agreed with Poniatoff. Poniatoff's handling of this touchy situation seems to typify his role and success as Ampex' head. For one, he possessed the technological insight and knowledge to recognize these engineers talents and achievements. But, also and just as important, he was able to deal with these people in a straight and honest way which created no personal rivalries or

bitterness. As he exemplified then and as he states now,

"First it is important to show great interest and enthusiasm

in people's work. And second, never discourage them."

Poniatoff can recall: often an engineer would approach him with an idea which frequently he viewed skeptically, and sometimes even realized it's out right futility. Instead of rejecting the idea or plan altogether, however, he would admit that though he didn't agree with it, the odds might just be 50-50 they were right. Often there people spent futile hours discovering they were wrong, but Poniatoff understood this was not only a learning process but a key to the company's positive morale.

As the deadline for the NAB show in New York grew closer, the project crew put in longer and longer hours trying desperately to complete the machine. Poniatoff himself was leaving at 11:00 at night and returning at 7:00 in the morning. One morning he entered to find Harold Lindsay in the plant and when <sup>he</sup> inquired <sup>as to</sup> when he had gotten in, Lindsay replied that he had never left.



The morning that the show opened, the crew was still fitting together the machines final components. They finished just in time to fly the completed Model 300 back to New York where it was unveiled that night. The machine was an astounding success. The engineers had managed to develop an even higher quality machine which could be bought for \$1750 - far less than Model 200. Poniatoff received a bundle of congratulatory telegrams, as well as orders from stations all over the country for this new recording machine. Ampex was on its way.

In the next several years Ampex went on to develop and even pioneer a number of technological advances in the recording field. One such diversification was in the area of theater sound. Their involvement here came after a mysterious visit from a "Mr. Edwards" who after looking at the Ampex' equipment and being highly impressed with it, revealed that he was not "Mr. Edwards" at all, but Mike Todd. In 1955 the first Todd-A O film, 'Oklahoma' was released featuring the new six track sound system developed by Ampex. This was Ampex' first entry into the theater sound business. In December, 1960 the Ampex theater sound system was presented to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. On the basis of its performance, and the accolades of sound engineers at several major studios, the Academy voted to award Ampex an Oscar



for technical achievement. Ampex sound systems are presently in use in theaters throughout the world.

As great as the Ampex development in the tape recording field turned out to be, probably as great an achievement was the pioneering development they made in video recording. Video being the process of taping television pictures. Initially video was used for delaying original productions for airing at appropriate hours in different time zones. Subsequently, it has become a versatile and indispensable tool of television production and a great boom to the growth of world wide television.

Most of the credit for the success in the video area may be attributed to Charles Ginsburg. For, it was Ginsburg, who began working at Ampex in January of 1952, who led a dedicated team of engineers to this success. Originally, the sum of \$14,500 was allotted by the company to investigate the possibility of developing a rotary recording head for a tape recorder that would achieve the high relative head-to-head speeds necessary for recording television images. Just as inauspicious as the initial financial commitment was Ginsburg's first working space. His first week he had no bench and worked on the floor. Eventually, though, he managed his first Ampex laboratory-a converted ladies room.

Ginsburg worked alone until August of that year at which time he acquired a new assistant. The assistant, extraordinary as it may seem, was an extremely adept local high school student named Ray Dolby who had been brought to Poniatoff's attention. Ginsburg worked on a temporary project with Dolby and was so impressed with his ability, he asked to have him made a fulltime employee and assigned to him. Dolby accepted and continued his college studies at night.

Now this team of two began to attack the problem with great vigor.

They worked long and hard on the project receiving very little money from the Ampex budget. Much of their work was done on their own time as not to exhaust the "official" funds. Eventually their decision to utilize a rotary head brought them a great breakthrough. Instead of the signal being recorded laterally along the length of the tape, it would be recorded almost vertically by means of a rotary head.

Alex Poniatoff maintained a lively interest in the project right from its inception. Ginsburg relates an incident which occurred early in the project. In 1952, Ginsburg was stuck for days trying to solve a complex formula for the capacitance of the video recorder's rotating cylinder, a vitally

important parameter. Poniatoff, on a walk through the company's laboratories, poked his head in the door to ask Ginsburg how the work was going. Ginsburg merely shrugged and pointed at the blackboard. Poniatoff surveyed the trailing formula and frowned, "well, keep at it," he said, and went back to his office.

Later that afternoon Poniatoff came back with a sheet of paper on which was the entire solution to the equation. "Will this help?" was all he said. It did.

While the engineering team maintained its faith in the project not everybody shared their enthusiasm. In February of 1956, just a few weeks before the scheduled unveiling of the machine, the Board-of-Directors called a special marketing meeting and expressed their pessimistic forecast for the machine. Basically, they concluded if the many impossible "ifs" in the project were to eventuate at the most they might expect to sell 30 machines by 1960, at about \$30,000 each. As they had already spent \$850,000 on the project they decided to discontinue it. The project team refused to be discouraged, however, and asked to use a spare room in the attic; where they continued to work overtime and on weekends until finally they solved the problem.

On April 14, 1956, managers of CBS affiliate station gathered at the Conrad Hilton Hotel in San Francisco, to witness a video demonstration. As Ginsburg recalls, "We were scared to death. At first there was just silence...and then all hell broke loose. They were hollering and screaming and jumping out of their seats." Firm orders taken at the meeting amounted to about \$1 million and within four weeks after the demonstration \$4.5 million in orders were logged. By 1962, Ampex had delivered 1,000 video recorders, plus many accessories at an average price of more than \$50,000. History was to make that particular forecast by the board of directors look <sup>very</sup> bad.

A year after this momentous demonstration the television industry paid formal tribute to the dramatic Ampex achievement. In March of 1957, Charles Ginsburg personally stepped forward to receive the coveted Emmy award on behalf of Ampex and especially on behalf of his team of hard-working engineers.

Ampex, of course, was eventually to develop and expand into one of the most reknown electronics corporations in the world-with distributing and manufacturing plants in Japan, France, Australia, Hong Kong and all over the world. This grand expansion must be a source of wonder and amazement to

its founder Alexander Poniatoff. The magnitude of the company's evolution from a handful of people working in a loft above a furniture store to a corporation with over 3,000 employees and annual gross sales of , would be enough to astound the even most imaginative entrepreneur.

Certainly co-incidences such as the Mullins-Crosby-McMicking sequence played a vital role in the company's development; as did the engineering prowess and determination of people such as Harold Lindsay and Charles Ginsbury. But what was obviously the thread and spirit that was to tie these people and events all together was Alexander Poniatoff himself.

Poniatoff, by nature, plays down his role in this tremendous development. If he is not giving others the credit, then at most he will concede that it was his uncanny intuitive ability which should be given credit for what ever success he has attained. It is this same intuition that caused him to take the test plane 1500 feet higher than required, or, in Siberia caused him to heed the warning and thereby escape punishment and most possibly death. Again, it was intuition that caused him to keep Ampex Company going despite the lack of capital or a peace time product to develop. And, of course, it was his strong intuition that defied the logic of experts in the field, and which



persisted in the eventual development of the world's first reliable magnetic ~~tape~~ recorder.

Some years ago a professor \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_ interviewed the heads of many large corporations and he found that what these men claimed was the most attributable aspect of their success was their intuition. Intuition, however, no matter how intangible or vague it might seem as an implement of success, must have its sources. This innate sense of knowing what is<sup>s</sup> right must be an extension of that person's wisdom. Wisdom implies an accumulation of knowledge. This knowledge can be gained by philosophic or scientific learning or from life's experiences. But even then it is incomplete. Wisdom requires the ability to discern inner qualities and relationships with a certain insight. Alexander Poniatoff possesses this trait. Whether it developed as a result of his contrasting early childhood conditioning, or his being stripped of his identity several times throughout his life, we cannot be sure. Why, in fact, did these experiences prove to strengthen Poniatoff when they could have just as easily confused or destroyed him?

Alexander Poniatoff has, by nature, always been a researcher and explorer. He pursued these pass times in the field of technology for a number of years with great success. In the past ten to twelve years, however, he has taken on some new areas of exploration. In the following two parts of this book, we will explore in more detail Alexander Poniatoff's accumulated wisdom. In Part II the subject <sup>on</sup> of Nutrituion, stress Relief and Longevity, we see more the results of his on-going quest for scientific experience and learning as it relates to this field. In Part III, an attempt is made to explain in clear, concise detail the experience and the expansion of his spiritual self.

As mentioned in the introduction, Poniatoff's intent here is to share some of this wisdom with the reader. For, he feels, the conscious pursuit and eventual inclusion of these two areas into our lives will make people lives longer, happier and more meaningful. In so doing, man would achieve the great human potential with which he is so blessed. It is this potential upon which the fate of the world rests, for as Poniatoff says,

"A mans life is not complete without winning a victory for humanity."

Poniatoff biography

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